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**Testimony to the Senate Education Committee**  
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Thank you Chairman Pavlov and members of the committee for giving us time today to testify on the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC). Let me begin by clearly stating that the Michigan Association of Secondary School Administrators (MASSP) strongly supports the MMC in its current form and particularly opposes any changes that would impact the core academic content of the curriculum (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies).

As middle and high school principals, assistant principals and career and technical education program administrators, the 1,800 members of MASSP understand acutely the challenge that schools face daily in preparing students to be career and college ready. MASSP's members serve on the front lines of implementing Michigan's current standards and we are here to tell you that these rigorous standards are working.

The class of 2012 marks the second class to graduate under the current MMC and, contrary to the dire predictions that the MMC's high standards would lead to mass dropouts, Michigan's graduation rate increased 2 percent last year while the dropout rate fell. This same group of students gave Michigan it's fourth straight year of improvement in ACT scores since the state started assessing all students in 2008.

What these successes illustrate is that what principals across the state will tell you: one of the first steps to closing Michigan's achievement gap is to close the expectation gap. It is essential for administrators to create and sustain a culture within their buildings and districts in which ALL stakeholders believe standards should be constant and time and intervention to learn them should be variables. This very point is made clear by distinguished author and educational speaker, Stephen Peters, when he stated, "We can't rise to low expectations."

The Michigan Merit Curriculum represents that commitment to close the expectation gap for our students. To change the odds for student success, to fulfill our mission of closing the achievement gap for all students, and to realize our vision of graduating all students college, career, and citizenship ready, we must resist the temptation to circle the wagons and shoot inward. We must commit ourselves to a framework of high-leverage, high-pay-off initiatives and strategies, like MMC, that local educators can implement with strategic intent.

**The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals advances learning through educational leadership.**

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As principals, not just of traditional schools, but also career and technical education centers, MASSP members understand and appreciate the special challenges that face these programs when it comes to implementing the MMC. What we also know is that career and technical education programs across the state have risen to the challenge of integrating this rigorous curriculum into their programs. This integration is happening in ISD-based programs from Oakland Schools to Wexford-Missaukee ISD to Traverse Bay ISD and in local districts as varied as Armada and Detroit. In addition, students and schools have options to adapt their schedule to meet the MMC through a personal curriculum, online courses, zero and seventh hour classes, and a host of other options.

While we appreciate that some career and technical programs have seen a fall in enrollment, we can also point to examples of programs that have seen increases. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that it is the MMC that is causing a decline in enrollment in career and technical education programs or keeping students out of these programs. In light of the increasing education options available to students at the secondary level including such things as AP and IB classes, dual enrollment, and early and middle college programs, we would suggest that many students are simply making other choices. There is no denying that Michigan has jobs available in fields like agriculture and skilled manufacturing, but as any parent that has tried to talk their child out of studying art history can attest, students don't always make education choices based on future job prospects.

Finally, we urge the committee to keep in mind that changes to the MMC will almost certainly impact student performance on state assessments. At a time when more and more high stakes decisions are based on this student performance, these changes could have a significant impact on the accountability structure that the Michigan legislature has built over the past several years. Currently, student achievement on state assessments is used to determine performance funding, 50% of every educator's evaluation, the state's Top-to-Bottom list, Priority Schools, Focus Schools, and—potentially—whether or not a school goes into the Education Achievement Authority (EAA). Why then would we want to now back away from a strategy that is proving successful in driving higher student achievement?

The Michigan Merit Curriculum has proven itself over the last six years to be a successful tool that improves outcomes for students and improves Michigan's overall performance. It is being implemented successfully in traditional and non-traditional education systems across the state and it is raising the bar for what Michigan students can achieve. MASSP urges the committee to maintain the MMC in its current form with particular emphasis on maintaining the rigor currently in place in the core academic areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Thank you.



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